



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Atlantic Herring: Council Signs Off on 2023-2025 Specifications; Receives Stock Assessment Overview

The New England Fishery Management Council voted on a 2023-2025 specifications package that will determine catch limits for the Atlantic herring fishery for the next three fishing years.

The Council took this step during its [September 2022 hybrid meeting](#) in Gloucester and based the decision on:

- The most recent [stock assessment information](#) available;
- The Scientific and Statistical Committee’s overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) [recommendations](#) for the resource; and
- The herring rebuilding plan in [Framework Adjustment 9](#).

The 2023-2025 annual catch limits (ACLs) are low but represent an increase from recent fishing years. For comparison, here is what the 2022 area-by-area sub-ACLs were:

Atlantic Herring Management Areas	Initial 2022 Sub-ACLs
Area 1A	1,184
Area 1B	176
Area 2	1,139
Area 3	1,598
<b>Total ACL</b>	<b>4,098</b>

The sub-ACLs above are in metric tons (mt).

### 2023-2025 Atlantic Herring Specifications (in Metric Tons)

Specification	2023	2024	2025
Overfishing Limit (OFL)	29,138	32,233	40,727
Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)	16,649	23,409	28,181
Management Uncertainty*	4,220	4,220	4,220
Optimum Yield / Annual Catch Limit (OY/ACL)	12,429	19,189	23,961
Domestic Annual Harvest	12,429	19,189	23,961
Border Transfer	0	0	0
Domestic Annual Processing	12,429	19,189	23,961
U.S. At-Sea Processing	0	0	0
Area 1A Sub-ACL (28.9%)*	3,592	5,546	6,925
Area 1B Sub-ACL (4.3%)	534	825	1,030
Area 2 Sub-ACL (27.8%)	3,455	5,335	6,661
Area 3 Sub-ACL (39%)	4,847	7,484	9,345
Fixed Gear Set-Aside	30	30	30
Research Set-Aside as % of Sub-ACLs	0%	0%	0%

\* If the New Brunswick weir fishery landings through October 1 are less than the associated “trigger” of 2,722 mt, then 1,000 mt will be subtracted from the management uncertainty buffer and added to the Area 1A sub-ACL and the ACL.



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The specifications must be approved and implemented by NOAA Fisheries before going into place. The new herring fishing year will begin on January 1, 2023.

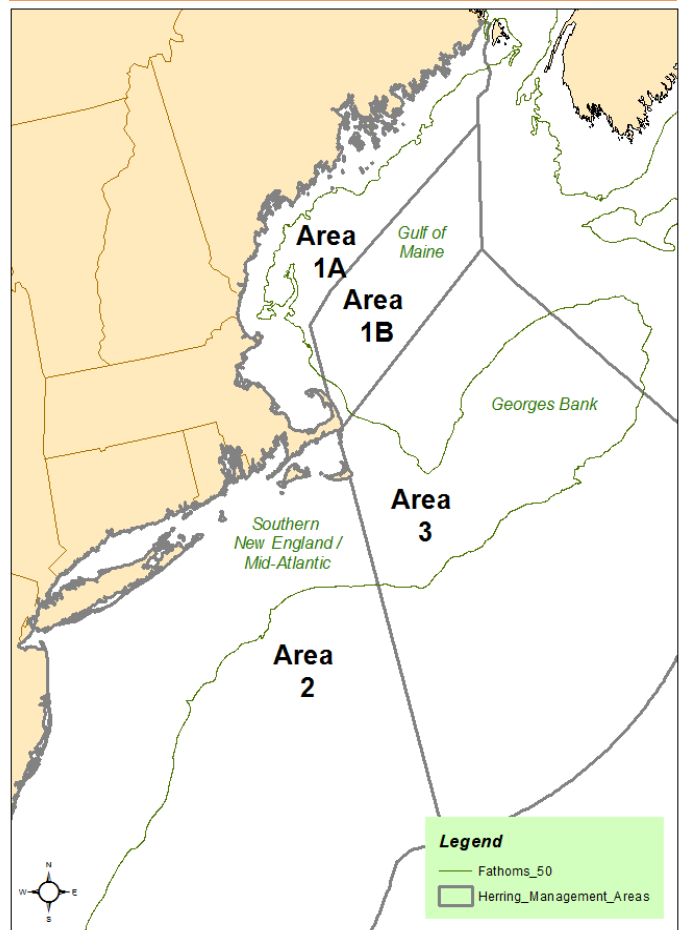
**STOCK ASSESMENT:** Before considering the specifications package, the Council received a [presentation](#) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center on the [peer reviewed results](#) from the [June 2022](#) Atlantic Herring Management Track Stock Assessment.

The assessment results indicate:

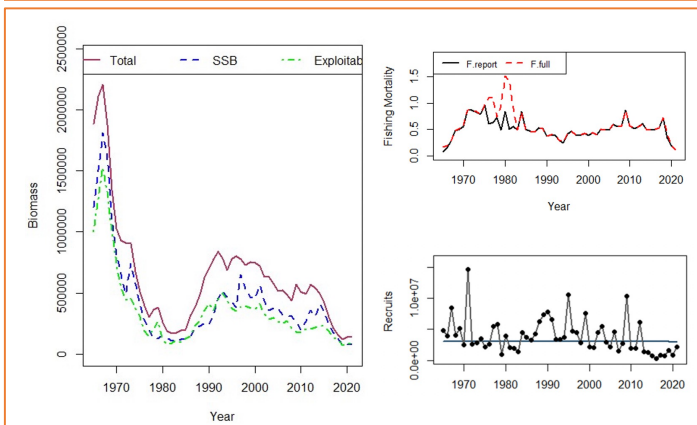
- Atlantic herring is overfished but overfishing is not occurring.
- Survey data from 2020 was missing because surveys did not occur due to public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue represents a source of uncertainty in the assessment.
- Spawning stock biomass in 2021 was estimated to be at 21% of the biomass target.
- Fishing mortality in 2021 was very low, estimated at 31% of the overfishing threshold proxy.
- Despite low fishing pressure, recruitment continues to be poor, which is another source of uncertainty. And, among other results,
- The assessment used an updated method to develop projections about future recruitment, which the stock assessment peer reviewers, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and the Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) consider to be more realistic.



## Atlantic Herring Management Areas



## 2022 Atlantic Herring Assessment Results: Biomass, Fishing Mortality, and Recruitment Trends from 1965 through 2021





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The SSC considered the assessment results and based its overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations on the Council’s ABC control rule for herring, which was developed in [Amendment 8](#) to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The control rule is biomass-based, so when biomass declines, the allowable level of fishing mortality on the resource also declines. The maximum fishing mortality allowed on the herring resource under the ABC control rule is 80% in order to account for herring’s role in the ecosystem as a forage species. If biomass declines below a specified low level, fishing mortality is reduced to zero.

The specifications also factor in the Council’s rebuilding plan for herring, which was adopted through [Framework Adjustment 9](#) to the Atlantic Herring FMP and [implemented on August 18, 2022](#). Under the framework’s rebuilding projections, the herring resource is expected to rebuild in five years – by fishing year 2026 – assuming long-term average recruitment in the fishery, although updated projections indicate rebuilding may take an additional two years.

The 2023-2025 specifications package will be submitted to the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) for review, approval, and implementation. The package maintains the river herring and shad catch caps that are currently in place for specific gear types as shown in the table below.

**FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 7:** The Council also discussed [Framework Adjustment 7](#) to the herring plan, which has been under development since 2019. The action proposes measures to protect spawning adult herring on Georges Bank.

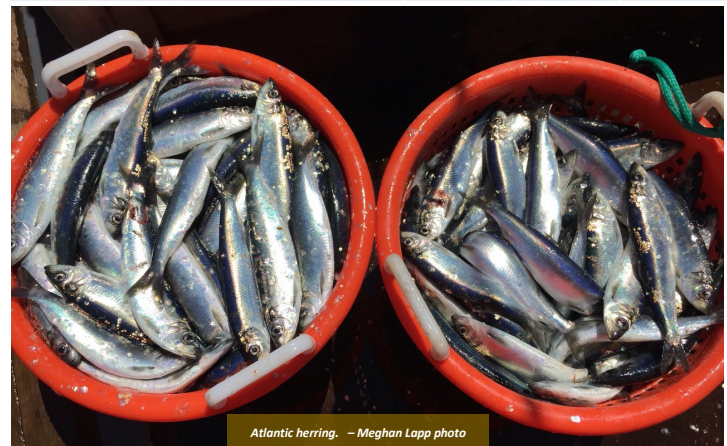
The Council considered changing its 2022 herring priorities to discontinue work on the action for several reasons, including: (1) fishing activity for herring on Georges Bank has dropped considerably under the current low catch limits; (2) monitoring and enforcement of offshore spawning areas will be difficult; (3) the Council’s herring staff will be focused on completing and submitting the herring specifications package over the next few months; and (4) much more work needs to be conducted to fully develop the details of Framework 7.

However, many Council members preferred to continue developing the framework, recognizing that focused work on this action will resume in early 2023. Therefore, the Council will proceed with developing the details of this action.

**QUESTIONS?** Contact Dr. Jamie Courname at [jcourname@nefmc.org](mailto:jcourname@nefmc.org).

## River Herring and Shad Catch Caps Fishing Years 2023-2025 (in metric tons)

Gear and Area	2023	2024	2025
Midwater Trawl Gulf of Maine	76.7	76.7	76.7
Midwater Trawl Cape Cod	32.4	32.4	32.4
Midwater Trawl Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic	129.6	129.6	129.6
Bottom Trawl Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic	122.3	122.3	122.3



Atlantic herring. – Meghan Lapp photo